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SUBJECT: CAMEROON AND NIGERIA BEGIN HISTORIC BORDER  
DEMARCATIION

¶1. (U) Summary: On December 14, Cameroon and Nigeria laid the first pillar to demarcate their land border, in compliance with a 2002 International Court of Justice ruling. In remarks at the event, Cameroonian Minister of Justice Amadou Ali called the border a "bridge" rather than a "separation wall" between Cameroon and Nigeria and praised bilateral ties as "united by destiny." According to the local UNDP Resrep, this demarcation (which has taken seven years of difficult work) is a first for a UN-led peaceful resolution of a border dispute in Africa and one of the only such cases in the world. It should further strengthen Cameroonian-Nigerian relations, which have improved since the handover of the Bakassi Peninsula in 2008; nonetheless, there is a long way to go to complete the installation of pillars along the 2,000 kilometer border. The UN and Minister Ali highlighted the need for more funding to complete the effort. The USG might consider providing Section 1207 or other assistance. End summary.

#### Laying Pillars of "Neighborhood and Friendship"

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¶2. (U) On December 14, Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Justice Amadou Ali presided over a ceremony in the Far North Region to lay the first symbolic pillar demarcating the 2,000 kilometer Cameroon-Nigerian land border. This launched the final stage in implementing a 2002 International Court of Justice ruling which called for the demarcation of the border under the auspices of a UN-led bilateral Mixed Commission. Among those attending the ceremony, which took place in remote Amchide, near the town of Kousseri, were a representative of Nigerian Prince Bola Adjibola, Special Representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations for West Africa and Chairman of the Mixed Commission Said Djinnit, and Ambassadors from the European Union, U.K., Canada, France, Germany and the United States (donor and "witness" countries).

¶3. (U) In his remarks, Minister Ali highlighted that "the laying of border pillars does not in any case mean to separate the Cameroonian populations from their Nigerian counterparts, as in most cases, they are of the same ethnic group and from the same family. It is just meant to let each and every administration know the limits of its sphere of competence, considering the border, which is far from being a separation wall, should be a bridge that causes the revival of neighborhood and friendship links among the Cameroonian and Nigerian populations." He concluded by affirming that "Cameroon and Nigeria are two countries united by history and geography and their respective people are united by destiny." Ali thanked the international community for its diplomatic and financial support and underscored the positive roles played by Cameroonian President Paul Biya, Nigerian former President Olusegun Obasanjo and current President Umar Yar'adua and the current and former UN Secretaries General.



14. (SBU) After the event, UNDP Resrep in Cameroon Thierry Mertens highlighted to Pol/Econ Chief the unique significance of this border demarcation, claiming it was the first time in Africa and one of the few cases in the world of such a border dispute being resolved peacefully through a UN-led process. He pointed out that the Commission's work over the past seven years has been logistically and financially very challenging.

Those demarcating the border had to master difficult terrain, which in some remote areas required helicopters to access. They had to deal with climate extremes and some tricky security situations. They had to help negotiate disputes and sensitize local populations. The key to success, according to Mertens, was the fact that the governments of Cameroon and Nigeria were both determined to succeed and committed to a peaceful process.

15. (U) Mertens and Ali, in his remarks, both pointed to the need for additional funding to complete the installation of a total of about 2,400 pillars. Mertens acknowledged that substantial funds still remain in the pipeline from the donors to the effort - the European Union, and the governments of Canada and the United Kingdom. Nonetheless, he anticipated the need for an additional \$6 million and said the UN would organize a donor roundtable on the outstanding financial needs some time in 2010.

Comment

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16. (SBU) The laying of border pillars should further cement the improved relations between Cameroon and Nigeria following the handover of the Bakassi Peninsula in 2008. As Ali noted in his remarks, an estimated three million Nigerians live in Cameroon and about one million Cameroonians reside in Nigeria, creating people-to-people and commercial ties which should increasingly bond these two neighbors in friendship. The Government of Cameroon's excitement about this historic moment was underscored by the size of its delegation - Minister Ali chartered a plane and transported about 100 people to the event and then to his nearby village for a celebration. According to Martin, the Nigerians are also enthusiastic about the laying of pillars; he dismissed some Cameroonian press speculation that Prince Adjibola's absence from the December 14 event signified a lack of Nigerian commitment, saying that the Prince did not travel because of serious illness.

17. (SBU) While December 14 drew attention to an historic, rare peaceful resolution of a long-festering border dispute, the process is far from over. A senior official at the European Union (the largest donor to the demarcation effort) remarked to Pol/Econ Chief that the UN management had been less than ideal, with significant inefficiencies and delays. He was not convinced of the need for millions of more dollars to finish the project. He also pointed out that the Amchide border post was not the first pillar installed, just the first that was relatively easily accessible for a joint Nigerian-Cameroonian ceremony. Nonetheless, he agreed December 14 was an important symbolic positive step that the EU will continue to support. As a Greentree "witness" state, the USG might consider financially supporting this process as well, through Section 1207 funding or in other ways.

GARVEY